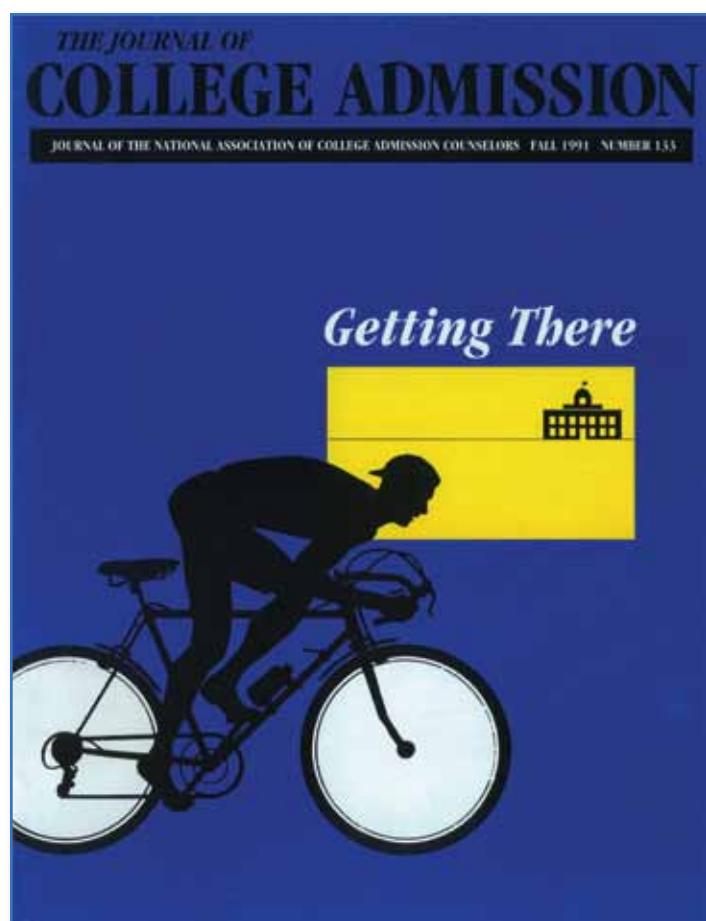


Surviving the War: A College Counselor's Journal

Response: "Surviving the War—and the Peace" Doug Thompson on page 85



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From 1991: PHILIP L. CLINTON is the director of college counseling at Cairo American College in Egypt. He received a B.A. from Oberlin College in Ohio and an M.Div. from the Divinity School at Duke University in North Carolina.

August 13, 1990

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August 26, 1990

School has been going for a week or so now. Jan is here from Washington University, meeting students, parents, and trustees. There's much more talk of the American response to Iraqi aggression, and folks are beginning to talk about some kind of military action. Still, there doesn't seem to be much worry about us in Cairo. Word from the Gulf is that people are fleeing Kuwait in droves. There is some confusion as to what will happen to the American schools in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

August 27, 1990

Our principal called me and the other two guidance counselors into his office today. Gone was the usual, light-hearted banter. Instead, we were the first to be told that the school's trustees had authorized the admission of a bunch of new high school students, exiled from the American and international schools in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. Of course, eleven of them are

August, 28 1990

I just got a call from Steve Syverson at Lawrence University in Wisconsin. He's scheduled to come over to help with a college night program and bring the message of the small, liberal arts college to our kids. "Is it safe to come?" he asks. I give him my usual Middle East geography lesson ("We're a long way from Baghdad ...") and end up telling him that it's probably safer here than in New York City (but, probably not than where Syverson's coming from: Appleton, Wisconsin). It sounds like he's coming. More hospitality details to work on.

August, 30 1990

I don't think I'll ever get these new kids worked into our program. Most of them have aspirations of studying in the States, but just getting to know them is proving to be a major undertaking. Advising them is another story altogether. The Kuwaiti kids are being a lot braver than I would be under similar circumstances. They seem to be getting right down to business. Still, I notice that they spend a lot of time together. Small groups of students. Exiles. How must it be to hear stories of your homeland being ravaged? Some of their parents are still not out of Kuwait, and the border is closed.

October 6, 1990

NACAC conference in Louisville was good as always. It was good to be with colleagues and old friends. Most were surprised that I'd gotten in from Cairo and even more surprised that I'd be going back! On a visit to DePauw, I had a chance to hear their new superstar, Ken Bode (a former NBC news reporter). After his talk, a few of us chatted with Ken and he made the comment that, if he was I, he wouldn't be going back to Cairo in this situation, and

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seniors. Many of the students have no school records with them and the kids from Kuwait may never be able to get official records. "Where are we going to put them? Most of the sections are bursting already!" "Will they be able to graduate without records from previous schools?" "They've missed almost three weeks of the term!" Even with so many unanswered questions and complaints, we agreed that it is the least we could do for these kids. I have a feeling that this is going to be a long year.

especially if he had a wife and kids like I did! I probably shouldn't tell Debby and the boys of this particular part of my trip. Security at the airports has increased tremendously.

October 7, 1990

Dennis Johnson from Luther College in Iowa called today from Cyprus. He's scheduled to come visit tomorrow, but was concerned because he'd heard the State Department had issued a travel advisory for the Middle East that included Egypt. Should he still plan on coming?

We had a “before the war” party tonight. With CNN reporting all the news, we ate and drank. It got pretty funny, a rather macabre ending to the day. Tonight, I began to acknowledge my own fears. I’ve stashed away as many dollars in cash as I dare. I’ve got all our papers in one place ready to go, “just in case....”

That's the first I'd heard of the advisory. I told him that if he felt safe in Cyprus, he'd certainly feel safe in Cairo. He decides to come along. I made my first contact with the American Embassy here to find out about the travel advisory. I got a rather contradictory response and wonder if the U.S. government knows what's really going on. To talk with the embassy, it sounds like there's nothing at all unusual happening over here.

November 15, 1990

Applications are beginning to come into the office. With all the recommendation writing, I've barely noticed the month slip by. The U.S. troop buildup continues in Saudi Arabia and there seems to be the growing expectation that something will happen. I'm too busy to take any real notice. Folks back in the States are calling more frequently now, “Just to check up and see how you are.” They must think we’re right on the frontline! I must admit, that when we can tune in the BBC, the rhetoric seems to be heating up. Now it seems to be more a question of when, not what will happen. Still no word on transcripts from our Kuwaiti kids. I decided to process their college applications anyway. Surely, the colleges back home will understand.

December 13, 1990

Our principal came today to ask that all transcripts be photocopied for him to take to the States over Christmas break, “Just in case something happens.” That phrase is getting a work out these days. I think he’s being overly cautious, but we get the copying done for him.

December 15, 1990

All the January 1st deadline applications are in the APO (the U.S. embassy’s) mail system! What an accomplishment! Each application is neatly bundled for each college and tidily photocopied “just in case something happens” to it in the mail. Saddam Hussein is now a household name. Christmas is coming. Lots of angry words from both sides. CNN has just come on the air in Egypt, so now we can keep in touch with every nuance of the situation. There are some folks who are actually becoming “CNN junkies” watching until the early hours of the morning for any and all news. We just sit and wait. If ever I’ve needed a vacation, it’s now.

January 13, 1991

This is the first day back after Christmas break. I attended a morning briefing at the U.S. embassy. In the past month, things have really heated up and the January 15th deadline is only hours away. It looks like war will break out. At the briefing, the ambassador was confident Egypt is safe although no one back home thinks so. During our question and answer session, I’m assured that the APO mail system will continue to function even when hostilities break out. At least I won’t have to worry about getting out the next couple of hundred applications. I make a major shopping trip tonight to finish stockpiling supplies (water, flour, rice, soap), “just in case....”

January 14, 1991

We had a “before the war” party tonight. With CNN reporting all the news, we ate and drank. It got pretty funny, a rather macabre ending to the day. Tonight, I began to acknowledge my own fears. I’ve stashed away as many dollars in cash as I dare. I’ve got all our papers in one place ready to go, “just in case....” At supper tonight, we talked about what we’d take if we had to get out quickly and we all agreed that there really isn’t much that we actually need. “Who’ll take care of the cats if we leave, Dad?” one of my sons asks.

I had a fax from a Hood College rep who was on her way over to visit us in Cairo. When she arrived in Paris, the U.S. embassy and the Air France reps told her to “return to the U.S. immediately.” Words like that remind me that the situation over here is more volatile than I’m willing to admit. I guess we can forget about seeing any more college reps over here for a while.

January 15, 1991

The deadline in Iraq has come and nothing has happened yet. The waiting is unbearable. We just wish something would happen. I try to carry on as usual, but events loom in my mind. It’s hard to concentrate on all the applications that still need to get out.

January 18, 1991

The war is under way. Today, we had a bomb threat at school. Everyone was herded out onto the fields while all the buildings were searched. We tried not to scare the elementary school kids, but there are only so many euphemisms for "bomb threat." Talk today is of the kids who have been evacuated from the school. Estimates are that at least 10 percent of our kids have been taken out of the country by companies their parents work for over here.

January 19, 1991

We just found out that the APO mail system has banned anything other than letter-sized envelopes until further notice. The seventy-five applications so carefully prepared in large, manila envelopes can't go packaged like that. A second call to the embassy verifies that all mail will be delayed in and out of Egypt. Most of the airlines have stopped their flights and U.S. military transports are all tied up in the Gulf. Now what? I've got boxes of mail and no way to get it out. February 1st deadlines have to be met. After several calls to Federal Express, a deal is struck: they'll guarantee a three-day delivery of our boxes of mail to a drop point in the States. The superintendent agrees that "we'll do whatever we have to do" to get the college mail out. A quick FAX to my brother in Ithaca, New York, arranges their address as the drop point. I think we're back in business again!

January 21, 1991

The bomb threat meant that the campus is practically sealed off. Only students and teachers are allowed on campus. All bags must be searched. All after-school and weekend activities on campus have been canceled. What am I going to do about the SATs to be held here this weekend? Surely, we can find a way to give them.

January 26, 1991

After many memos and conversations with the school's administration, we work out a way for the outsiders to be allowed onto campus for the SATs. The kids are all escorted to a central holding area where the test is given. Bathroom visits are monitored. No one is left alone until safely outside the walls of the school. Still, they've asked that we cancel all the TOEFL tests and we change their location for the remainder of the year. All those non-U.S. students coming onto campus are a security office nightmare. I guess I understand.

January 27, 1991

I spent the day getting out a "Gulf War update" to all the colleges our kids are applying to, letting them know of our mail problems. "Use the FAX," I tell them. It's the only sure way of getting things back to us in Cairo until who knows when. Still, I shudder to think

of transcripts and test scores going out over the FAX lines. I wish there were a clearer policy as to the validity of FAXed material. Even more, I wish I had a trustworthy list of all the FAX numbers at the college admission offices. Why don't they publish their FAX numbers?

January 28, 1991

A second bomb threat sends us all outside again. I was in the middle of a huge job and can now count on at least a two-hour wait in the cold before I'll be able to get back in the office. What a pain! They ask us to "secure" our rooms before we left. Surveying the accumulated paper of a hectic application season, I realize that a bomb planted under all that paper might actually help to get my office cleaned up!

February 1, 1991

The trustees met last night and put a stop to all overseas travel by our students just as the Model U.N. students were getting ready to leave for the international conference at The Hague. No one is happy. The students have been preparing for months for this trip. Some of our best students will be deprived of the chance to participate in this event. Last year, it was great to be able to write to some of the colleges to report on the success of some of these students. This year, there won't be many success stories to tell. Besides the Model U.N., the wrestling team, the girls' basketball team, and the speech team trips are all cancelled. All other teams and activities with overseas trips have been "grounded" indefinitely. The war is wreaking havoc on our extracurricular program.

Affiliate Achiever

Harry Gong, Director of Admission

Niagara University, NY

New York State ACAC

What is a typical day like?

A typical day for me is heavy on the operational side, data management. Everything starts with clean data and easy access to it. I try to make sure that our operational staff has current information. Counselors and students need the most current information possible. So essentially having a smooth back-end process is the foundation to good customer service.

The rest of the day is interaction, meetings on campus with various committees, keeping counselors and operations on task, interacting with students and or families whether on campus or in a virtual or social networking environment.

February 5, 1991

We've gotten into a routine by now. The Federal Express man seems quite happy to cart away our boxes of U.S. bound mail. He's making quite a profit from us this year and we just keep churning out applications and mid-year reports.

February 14, 1991

I sat with Ahmed and his mother today. Ahmed is one of our exiled Kuwaiti seniors who has been on a steady decline all year long. There's no apparent reason why he should be failing chemistry, but he is. Back in Kuwait, Ahmed was elected president of his class and was one of his school's top athletes. Here at CAC, it's taken all his effort to settle in for such a short year. Besides that, his dad is out of a job and the family has lost their home in Kuwait. It's hard for me to come down too hard on Ahmed. For him, things couldn't get much worse.

February 20, 1991

It will only be a matter of time before the allies win. Iraq can't hold out for much longer. I can't wait to get back to life as normal, if it ever will.

March 1, 1991

The embassy "assured" us the APO would run as normal despite the war. But today, I had to FAX off an application dossier which we originally sent on January 15th. Of the six application packets I

mailed that day for one student, only one of them has arrived in the States. All had February 1st or 15th deadlines! I spend a half day getting copies of the applications ready for FAX and Federal Express. This is one time when all those hours spent making backup copies has paid off.

March 3, 1991

Cease fire, at last! There's a wonderful feeling in the air that we're coming out of this rather bleak period. I've learned a lot through these past few months. I've had to look at our systems and procedures to tighten them up and guard against any and all possibilities. I've sure learned new ways of meeting deadlines. I've found that doing business by FAX can open up an exciting dimension of college counseling. I can only hope that more colleges will allow us to use the FAX from overseas. From our many restrictions on campus, I've learned to appreciate the freedom to come and go at will and I'll be eternally grateful for the day when I don't have to open my briefcase for inspection again. I've been sobered by the reality that my students have lost homes, schools, and friends because of the aggression of one nation against another.

I've had the opportunity to take stock of that which is ultimately important to me and those I love. In the midst of the war and the fear of calamity, I've had to ponder the choices that might one day need to be made. As I think about it, I realize that the suitcase I had packed would only need to be a very small one, indeed.

Throwback: 1991

47th NACAC National Conference is held in New Orleans, LA. Regina E. Manley (Highland Park High School, IL) is NACAC's first African-American president.

Grunge music becomes popular.

Operation Desert Storm begins.

Tropical Rainforest shrinks by 1% annually as a result of human activities.

Magic Johnson announces he has HIV.

The Soviet Union restores the name Saint Petersburg to the city of Leningrad.

The Web browser is introduced.

The first Smart Board interactive whiteboard is introduced in classrooms.